

King and Pierce County Rail Speed Increases

Description of the filings before the Commission BNSF, as the track owner, has petitioned to increase rail speeds through seven cities in King and Pierce Counties. Two cities, Tacoma and Seattle, are class A cities and setting rails speeds through those towns is not under UTC authority. Sound Transit is the tenant (rents the line) and has an interest in increased speeds. Sound plans to begin commuter rail service by the end of this year between Tacoma and Seattle. Amtrak also has an interest in the outcome of these proceedings.

Auburn

Distance at lowest speed in town - 0.7 miles.

Current lowest speed - 40 mph (passenger and freight) increase sought 79 mph (passenger) 50 mph (freight)

Kent

Distance at lowest speed in town - 0.7 miles.

Current lowest speed - 40 mph (passenger and freight) increase sought 79 mph (passenger) 50 mph (freight)

Puyallup

Distance at lowest speed in town - ?? miles.

Current lowest speed - 40 - 50mph (passenger), 30-40 mph (freight) increase sought 79 mph (passenger) 50 mph (freight)

Sumner

Distance at lowest speed in town - ?? miles.

Current lowest speed - 65 mph (passenger), 50 mph (freight) increase sought 79 mph (passenger) 50 mph (freight)

Tukwila

Distance at lowest speed in town - ?? miles.

Current lowest speed - 79 mph (passenger), 60 mph (freight) - currently there is no UTC mandated speed limit in Tukwila

Identify likely interests and the groups that will want to be involved / informed: These filings have already attracted the attention of public officials in the affected cities as well as the electronic and print media. The public meetings on the speed requests are likely to attract considerable attention by the media and citizens in the affected communities.

Mayors
City councils
City and County Public Works Departments
County Councils / Commissioners
Police / Fire / Sheriff departments
Planning / Community Development departments
Legislators
Chambers of Commerce
Granges
Port districts
Puyallup Fair Officials
School districts

UTC's public involvement interests / needs

- Educate interested persons about issues related to rail safety in communities and planned developments (e.g., commuter rail service, high speed rail corridor) that will affect their community.
- Manage peoples' expectations about what the Commission can and cannot do in this situation.
- Obtain information from interested persons about local situations, practices and conditions that staff will need to look into as part of their investigation.
- Identify safety conditions that can be mitigated.
- Collect information about possible "unique local safety conditions."
- Conduct our meetings in an orderly and professional manner.

Themes / UTC messages:

- We want to use this opportunity to make the rail corridors in these communities safer than they already are.
- The public meetings and staff investigation that will follow are intended to discover whether there is a reason that rail speeds should not increase.

Planned Public Involvement / Communications to interested persons

Process used in earlier rail speed investigations (this is a good basic model that we can build upon)

- Letter to officials in affected cities and interested groups identified above describing the requested rail increase / UTC's authority and decision-making process (Public Affairs will assist in drafting this letter)
- Field visit to the affected cities.
- Press release announcing the public meetings
- Public meetings
- Staff investigation
- Letter to officials in affected cities and interested groups describing what staff has found in its investigation, asking for their comment, announcing the open meeting date.
- Open meeting for decision

Written Communications

- Letter to officials in affected cities and interested groups identified above describing the requested rail increase / UTC's authority and decision-making process.
- Press release announcing the public meetings
- Letter to officials in affected cities and interested groups describing what staff has found in its investigation, asking for their comment, announcing the open meeting date.

Public meetings

- We identified the need for at least two public meetings. The likely groupings of meetings: 1- Puyallup and Sumner; 2- Auburn, Kent, and Tukwila.
- Kent and Auburn may want / need separate meetings in their communities.
- Representatives of Sound Transit, BNSF (particularly the local roadmaster), FRA, AMTRAK will need to attend / be available to answer questions.
- We will recommend that one or more of the Commissioners participate in each of these meetings.
- Depending on the preferences of the Commissioners, we believe that it may make for a better controlled public meeting to have an Administrative Law Judge run the meeting.

Timing

- UTC order on train speeds - BNSF has requested that the UTC issue orders by 12/1/99.
- Open meeting for UTC action - 11/10 or 11/24 open meetings.
- Staff letter to affected communities describing findings - mailed 4 weeks (???) prior to open meeting.
 - Mailed by 10/10 if placed on agenda for 11/10 open meeting.
 - Mailed by 10/24 if placed on agenda for 11/24 open meeting.
- Staff investigation -- September / early October
- Public meetings - should occur early on so that information gathered can inform staff investigation. Must be concluded no later than mid-September to meet BNSF request order date. It would be better if the public meetings were concluded in August.
- Press release announcing public meetings - two weeks prior to first public meeting
- Letter to groups identified above - mailed at least three weeks prior to the first public meeting.